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# Immediate Experience and Mediation

*An Inaugural Lecture  
delivered before the University of Oxford  
20 November 1919*

BY

HAROLD H. JOACHIM

*Wykeham Professor of Logic*

OXFORD

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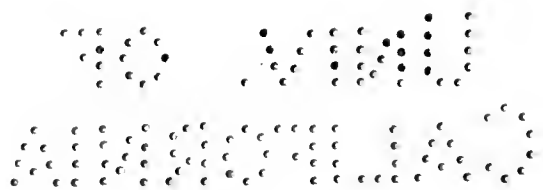
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and  
MEDIATION

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## IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE and MEDIATION

IF, in accordance with custom, I begin this Inaugural Lecture by commemorating my predecessor, I am only too well aware that no words of mine can be adequate to the subject. By all who came within the wide and powerful sweep of his influence, the late Wykeham Professor of Logic, John Cook Wilson, was recognized as one of the great forces in the spiritual life of Oxford; and though he has bequeathed to us the enduring memory of a noble example, we cannot but feel his death as an irreparable loss.

It is natural to think of him primarily as the incomparable teacher who, throughout his long career, first as tutor and then as professor, devoted himself, with unflinching energy and with remarkable success, to one of the most difficult tasks in the world—the task of communicating to others his own high sense of the seriousness of philosophy, of fostering in them his own single-hearted devotion to the truth. That this was the aim and spirit of his teaching, all who knew him will agree. ‘His outstanding characteristic’, writes one of his pupils,<sup>1</sup> ‘was his power of going to the root of a matter’;

<sup>1</sup> Mr. H. A. Prichard, in *Mind*, N.S., No. III, July, 1919.

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and again, 'There was infection in his conviction that the truth was a matter of high importance, that slovenly and confused thinking was a crime, and that words and phrases were a snare to great and small alike'.

Nor was his influence as a teacher by any means confined to his regular pupils. Many of his younger colleagues, teachers and writers on philosophical subjects, both here and at other Universities, owe him an incalculable debt of gratitude. For his knowledge—the knowledge of a master of the subject—was always at the service of any fellow-worker who consulted him. If I may quote my own experience, I shall ever gratefully remember the generous kindness with which, on more than one occasion, he came to my aid. He spared neither time nor trouble, but placed freely at my disposal his profound scholarship and his power of penetrating and suggestive criticism.

Though I cannot attempt a detailed estimate of his philosophical writings and views—and indeed I could add nothing to the admirable articles by Mr. H. W. B. Joseph<sup>1</sup> and Mr. H. A. Prichard<sup>2</sup>—there is one point on which I desire to touch. When we reflect upon Cook Wilson's many-sided nature—when we remember his brilliant intellectual powers, his mathematical capacity and attainments, his unrivalled knowledge of Greek Philosophy—

<sup>1</sup> 'John Cook Wilson, 1849–1915', in vol. vii of the *Proceedings of the British Academy*.

<sup>2</sup> In *Mind*, *l. c.*

it is impossible not to regret that he published, comparatively speaking, so little. There are certain philosophical subjects on which he was uniquely qualified to write. If, e. g., he had published, out of the fullness of his knowledge, a critical estimate of the more recent developments of Symbolic Logic, or, again, an edition of Plato's *Timaeus*, he would have given to the philosophical world works of the very greatest value. And yet, though such a feeling of regret is natural, there is another side to the question. For a Professor's work, interpreted as Cook Wilson interpreted it, is more than enough to absorb a man's whole strength and energy. He won for himself the love and reverence of many generations of pupils; he established a splendid tradition for his Chair; he spent himself unsparingly in the service of Philosophy. Who shall presume to say 'He might have done more', or 'He should have done otherwise'?

That all our knowledge rests in the end on immediate experience, that all mediation is grounded on immediacy, may pass at first sight for one of 'those clear truths that either their own evidence forces us to admit, or common experience makes it impudence to deny'.<sup>1</sup> The statement, in one form or another, is common enough. It comes to us like an old and familiar friend whom we have not the heart to distrust. Yet we shall find it

<sup>1</sup> Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ii. 1, § 18.



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difficult to determine *in what precise sense* immediate experience is the foundation of knowledge. Anything like an adequate discussion would carry us far beyond the limits of a single lecture. I shall have to ignore many problems that I would gladly investigate, and to take for granted much that I am ready and anxious to discuss. The utmost I can hope to do is to awaken fresh interest in some features of the subject, and perhaps to provoke the reconsideration of certain traditional theories. Nor is there anything original in what I have to say. It is old, and perhaps for that reason apt to be forgotten and worth reviving.

The distinction between Immediacy and Mediation is often applied so as to mark primarily, though not only, a difference of level in our experience. We see the sun 'as distant about 200 paces from the earth'; and this impression is 'immediate' by contrast with the knowledge of the sun's real distance which we may derive from astronomy. We 'feel that A is the thief'; and this instinctive feeling of distrust is 'immediate' by contrast with the mediate certainty resulting from proof of his guilt. We have an inexplicable dislike of Dr. Fell; and this 'immediate' and irrational emotion is contrasted with the reasoned love or hate which reflection might inspire. We are lost in admiration or reverence; sunk in contemplation; absorbed in, possessed by, the beautiful or the divine; and we call these visions of truth or beauty or divinity 'immediate',

contrasting them with the 'mediate' or reflective experiences of, e.g., the critic, the theologian, or the metaphysician.

The experiences here called 'immediate' belong to a level below, or at least other than, that of truth and falsity, in any strict sense of those terms, and are contrasted with experiences to which the distinction between true and false inevitably and naturally applies. If we speak of a 'true' instinct, a 'sound' or 'healthy' feeling of distrust, a 'true' sense of beauty or of the divine, our use of such epithets is proleptic. The 'true' instinct is one which may be converted into a reasoned knowledge. The 'sound' or 'healthy' feeling will approve itself on rational grounds, though, when thus approved, it will have passed into a form of experience which is more (even if it is also less) than feeling. And the 'true' sense of beauty or of the divine is strictly 'true' only when transformed into a philosophical theory.

If, therefore, our mediate experience or our knowledge is 'grounded' on what is *thus* immediate, the relation, whatever else it may be, is clearly not a logical dependence. The mediate experience is not related to the immediate as conclusion to premiss, or as logical consequent to logical antecedent. We do not know that A is a thief *because* we distrust him. We might, indeed, be tempted to view the Immediate as 'grounded upon' the Mediate. For the proof of A's guilt has converted our feeling into a reasoned distrust; the movement of media-

tion has ended in the grounding of the Immediate. But in the process the Immediate itself has been transformed. The original feeling of distrust is not the same as that which issues from, is justified by, the mediation; and we may continue to feel instinctive distrust of A, even if we know that B, not A, was the culprit. In short, our feeling that A is the thief is no more the logical consequent, than it was the logical ground, of the knowledge of his guilt.

So, again, the immediate experiences of the lover of beauty, of the whole-hearted seeker after truth or worshipper of the divine, are not premisses from which there logically follow the conclusions of the critic, the philosopher, or the theologian. They are *data* for analysis and criticism, materials to be sifted and tested, and in part, perhaps, converted into the substance of a reasoned knowledge. But the latter—the mediate experience—is ‘built’ (if we must employ so inadequate a metaphor) not *upon*, but *out of* the Immediate. The Immediate, if indeed it is the ‘foundation’, is a foundation which is fashioned and transformed in the process of mediation. And, notwithstanding this development, the original Immediate may, and often does, also survive. We still ‘see’ the sun as about 200 paces from the earth, even when we know its ‘real’ distance.<sup>1</sup> We still ‘feel’ the room hot, though we have established that the temperature is ‘really’ moderate, and that it is

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Spinoza, *Ethica*, ii. 35 S.

we who have a fever. And it seems at least possible to become a critic, a theologian, or a metaphysician without losing the immediate vision of beauty, the emotional faith in God, the whole-hearted absorption in the truth.

In the sense of the distinction thus imperfectly sketched, the relation between mediate and immediate experience is not a logical dependence. We start, in a sense, from what is immediately experienced; and again, in a sense, it is our aim to understand this Immediate, to give a reasoned account of it. What is immediately experienced perplexes us and sets us thinking; but the moment we begin to think, we are transforming our Immediate. There—within the analysis and synthesis which is thinking, within the process of mediation—we have antecedents and consequents, logical terms and logical relations. Often, no doubt, the mediation is but the bringing out what the initial Immediacy really is—*its* deepening, development, and growth; and our reasoned understanding is thus the grounded Immediate. But neither the process itself nor its result, if for the moment we distinguish the two—neither reasoning nor the reasoned understanding to which it leads or which it is—are logical consequents or logical grounds of the initial Immediacy.

Yet, in thus rejecting the conception of a logical connexion between mediate and immediate experience, we have stumbled upon another sense of the distinction. For we assumed that within the process of mediation

itself there are logical antecedents and logical consequents. And when it is maintained that 'all our knowledge rests in the end on immediate experience', *this*, it will be said, is the scope and significance of the distinction. Certain terms, within the process of mediation itself, are primary, the logical foundations of all the rest. And, being primary, they neither require, nor admit of, explanation or proof. Thus, there are certain fundamental principles, certain 'Laws of Thought', which are the *conditiones sine quibus non* of all sound reasoning. And again, within each sphere of inquiry there are certain basal facts, or connexions of facts, on which all other facts and connexions within that sphere depend. Unless we know *the first*—unless, at least, our reasoning is controlled by an intelligent recognition of their authority—we cannot be sure that we are explaining or demonstrating at all; and unless we also know *the second* (the basal connexions within the special sphere), we cannot explain or demonstrate any determinate fact or connexion. But if these principles and these basal connexions are known, the knowledge of them must clearly be immediate. They are, in short, primary, self-evident truths, the foundations of all our knowledge. To 'demonstrate' is to derive from indemonstrable, but self-luminous, truths; and the derivation must proceed in accordance with principles themselves self-evident. And to 'explain' is to resolve a complex into inexplicable, but self-explanatory, constituents—to re-state it



in terms of elements recognized immediately for what they are.

That all reasoning is based on the immediate intellectual apprehension of self-evident truths is the doctrine not only of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, but also of the *Regulae* of Descartes. According to Aristotle, the man of science, as the result of certain preliminary investigations with whose nature and method we are not here concerned, is enabled to formulate various προβλήματα. Each of these προβλήματα is a judgement, true but as yet unproved, asserting the connexion of a property (D) with its appropriate subject (A).<sup>1</sup> The connexion thus provisionally asserted has to be established—the unmediated judgement (A–D) has to be converted into a demonstrated truth of science. When the demonstrator starts, there is an 'interval'<sup>2</sup> whose ends are marked by the two terms<sup>3</sup> A and D; and this 'interval' between the subject and its property is as yet unfilled for his knowledge. His object is to discover the middle term or middle terms which are required to fill this gap—the links connecting A with D—and thus to substitute, for the unfilled interval A–D, a 'close-packed' interval,<sup>4</sup> i. e. an unbroken suc-

<sup>1</sup> The property is a *proprium* (α καθ' αὐτὸ συμβεβηκός), and the subject is an *infima species* (ἀτομὸν εἶδος) of the γένος which is the subject-matter of the science. The connexion is a necessary *nexus* between terms themselves universal.

<sup>2</sup> Α διάστημα.

<sup>3</sup> The ὅροι.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e. g. *Post. Anal.* 84 b 31–85 a 1. The term πυκνοῦσθαι is of course a reference to musical theory.

cession of minimal intervals or immediate judgements. The connexion of D with A will then be manifest as the inevitable conclusion of the self-evident connexion of D with C, of C with B, and of B with A. To demonstrate the necessary connexion of D with A is thus to analyse the 'stretch' between them into the indivisible, elementary 'stretches'<sup>1</sup> of which it is composed. These simple or indivisible intervals (the judgements A-B, B-C, C-D) are the primary, self-evident, and yet necessary truths, the immediate premisses, which the proof that A must be D presupposes as its logical foundations.

Such self-evident and yet necessary truths correspond to the 'simple propositions' or 'simple ideas' which, according to Descartes, are the intuitively apprehended *data* of all our knowledge. The human intellect, he maintains, is infallible in the exercise of the two functions which express its own nature—infallible in its acts of 'intuition', and infallible in its inferential movement.<sup>2</sup> Thus, I can apprehend the necessary, but immediate, implication of the two elements in a self-evident *datum* or 'simple proposition'. I can 'see', e.g., that ' $2 + 2 = 4$ ', and that 'my self-consciousness involves my existence'. And, by an unbroken inferential progress from self-evident to self-evident, my intellect can move to the infallible apprehension of a mediate necessary truth.

<sup>1</sup> ἄμεσα or ἀδιαίρετα διαστήματα, ἄμεσοι προτάσεις, στοιχεῖα, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e. g. *Regulae*, iii.

I may grasp the mediate necessary connexion of A with D, as the result of a series of acts of intellectual insight in which I have 'seen' the immediate necessary connexions of A with B, of B with C, and of C with D. However long and complex the mediation, however many links the chain of proof may contain, the inference is infallible because each of its steps is an infallible intuition.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the two great advocates of this analysis of mediation themselves bear witness against it. The failure of Aristotle's attempt to prove<sup>2</sup> that there must be immediate premisses in the texture of knowledge is not perhaps of much importance. But the thesis is irreconcilable with his general view of the relation of premisses to conclusion. For if, as he steadily insists, the demonstrated conclusion is the fulfilment of its premisses; if it is *their* realization, in which alone they attain their full significance:—they cannot be self-contained, self-evident truths in their isolation. The process of mediation is not the adding of line to line to form a longer line, nor the attachment of self-supporting bits of truth to one another. It is the unfolding of a germ—a natural development or growth: and there is, so to say, nothing in it which comes out at the end as it went in at the beginning. Nor does

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account of the theory of reasoning in the *Regulae* see my *Essay on the Nature of Truth*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Post. Anal.* A. 19-22.

Descartes in his own reasoning support the theory of the *Regulae*. He claims, indeed, to have found a primary self-evident link of the chain of knowledge in the 'simple proposition' that my self-consciousness involves my existence. His next step is to establish the necessary being of God; and this too—the necessary implication of existence in the 'essential nature' of God—is, he maintains, a self-evident truth. But the welding together of these two self-evident links profoundly alters the meaning of the first. The 'necessary being of God' shows itself as involved in 'my being'; and as this implication emerges, 'my being' is revealed in a different light. For it now appears that God is presupposed as that without which neither I nor any other finite existent could be at all, so that it is only within, and by virtue of, God's creative and sustaining power that 'my self-consciousness involves my existence'. The supposed self-supporting and self-contained *nexus*, the supposed primary *datum*, is manifestly derivative and contingent; and my knowledge of it is mediated by my knowledge of God.

The analysis of mediation, thus advocated and abandoned by Aristotle and Descartes alike, treats Intelligence and the Intelligible as if they were mathematical unities or mechanical conjunctions. A chain and its links, a line and its contiguous minimal intervals—what possible analogy do these bear to a whole of demonstrated truth, to an inference or a system of

knowledge? The 'logically-inevitable' is the very antithesis of the 'externally-connected'; and the 'spatially-contiguous' (or 'continuous') is but a travesty of the 'logically-one'. A theory of reasoning which relies on such analogies stands self-condemned. We might as well base our analysis of mediation on the equally plausible, and equally barbarous, assumptions that knowledge is an 'edifice', that truth is a 'ladder', and that an argument has 'steps'.

What, then, becomes of the doctrine that 'Mediation is grounded on the Immediate'? Are there no self-evident principles of reasoning? And are there no self-evident truths in the texture of knowledge—or none, at least, to guarantee our reasoning as the foundations on which it rests?

There is a sense in which every judgement is infallible. For, as Mr. F. H. Bradley<sup>1</sup> has expressed it, 'we cannot, while making a judgement, entertain the possibility of its error'. But every judgement alike is *thus* 'infallible'; and though 'infallible', it may be erroneous, and we ourselves may come to recognize its falsity. Again, there is a sense in which all truth is self-evident. For 'truth', in Spinoza's famous saying, 'is the criterion of itself and of the false, as light reveals itself and darkness'.<sup>2</sup> But to deny that truth is con-

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Truth and Reality*, p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> *Ethica*, ii. 43 S. 'Sane sicut lux seipsam et tenebras manifestat, sic veritas norma sui et falsi est'.



stituted by conformity to an external standard, is neither to suggest nor to support a distinction between truths which are, and truths which are not, self-evident; and it is this distinction that is in question and must, it seems, be surrendered.

Doubtless nothing could be intelligible, and there would be no sane reasoning, unless there were certain *conditiones sine quibus non* of Being and of Truth to which any and every fact and connexion of facts, and any and every reasoning, are bound to conform. And if, reflecting on this all-pervasive character of the Intelligible and of Intelligence, we formulate certain 'Laws of Thought', we are condensing into isolated judgements truth for which there is overwhelming evidence. Such judgements are 'indubitable'; for an *intelligent* doubt presupposes knowledge, and any and every knowledge inevitably confirms them. But the truth which they summarily express is not comprised within their formulation. The 'evidence' for them is anywhere and everywhere, but not contained within 'themselves'.

Doubtless, also, for each special science or body of knowledge there are certain more special and concrete conditions—*conditiones sine quibus non* of the intelligible, quasi-individual, wholes of Space, of Number, of Life, of Political Society—conditions, therefore, to which geometrical, arithmetical, biological, political reasonings must respectively conform. And if we reflect upon the

distinctive form of unity thus exhibited by each department of being—upon the dominant character pervading the differences within it and their cohesion—we may formulate certain ‘Axioms’, condensing once more into isolated judgements truth for which the evidence is overwhelming. Such ‘truths’ are stable, not because they, as judgements, hang together of themselves, but because they are but the concentrated expression of a whole of knowledge. The science as a whole falls short, indeed, of absolute self-containedness. It is not a body of demonstrated truth completely self-evident; for complete self-evidence demands, as its inseparable complement, perfect mediation. If a science were a plurality of elements, each precisely and purely conceived, each intelligibly necessitating each and all, and necessitated by each and by all, then (but only then) the mediation would be perfect, and the whole thus constituted would *eo ipso* be immediately intelligible, transparent, or self-evident. Nevertheless, the evidence for such an axiom as that ‘two straight lines cannot enclose a space’ is clearly overwhelming. Deny it—even doubt it—and the whole of plane geometry comes tumbling about your ears; and who shall say where the wreckage will stop, or what department of our knowledge would survive? As with the ‘Laws of Thought’, so with such more special principles of reasoning, the would-be doubter will search in vain for a knowledge or experience which does not commit

him to them—for a position entitling him to raise an intelligent doubt against them.

There are, it may be objected, within the texture of a science certain judgements, which hang together of themselves and are self-evident even when isolated from the context of mediation to which they belong. We apprehend two different,  $x$  and  $y$ , inseparably and yet immediately cohering. The addition of 2 to 2 carries with it, without the interposition of a third term, the sum 4. Or, to take a better example—for there may be 4 without the addition of 2 and 2, and the cohesion of *this*  $x$  and  $y$  is thus imperfect—the equality of the two sides of a triangle immediately and yet necessarily implies, and is implied by, the equality of the subtended angles. Here, it may be said, we have an item of absolute truth within the texture of a science. And if the chief aim of science is the discovery and establishment of 'Laws of Nature', what are these but typical examples of the inseparable, reciprocal cohesion of two different elements, each of which finds its inevitable complement in the other? The 'Law', or the 'immediate' necessary cohesion, is discovered indeed and established by a process of mediation. But, once established, it can be lifted in thought clear of any context, and is thus apprehended as a self-contained item of absolute truth.

Yet, on closer inspection, the dream evaporates; there are no atomic absolute truths within the texture

of a science. What we have, in the case supposed, is a pure, reciprocal, hypothetical judgement—if and so far as anything is  $x$ , then and so far it necessarily is  $y$ , and *vice versa*. And this judgement is the analysis and explication of a something which is both  $x$  and  $y$ .  $x$  alone is not the ground of  $y$ , nor  $y$  alone the ground of  $x$ . Neither  $x$  nor  $y$ , nor even the *nexus* along with the connected terms, are ‘self-evident’. The equality of the two sides is not a self-evident fact from which the equality of the subtended angles follows; nor is the latter the self-evident ground of the former. The *nexus* in its entirety is the inevitable explication of an Isosceles, and holds only within it.

Would the objector reply, ‘Then the analysis of the Isosceles *is* self-evident; the Isosceles is a whole of elements whose apprehension is but the clear and steady vision of themselves, and the Isosceles is given immediately in our experience of the extended world’? Such an answer does not seem to meet the difficulty. The analysis—the reciprocal hypothetical judgement—is true if (and only if) the Isosceles *is*, or is assumed to be. And its truth, resting thus on that assumption, stands and falls with the whole reasoned explication of Space. For the being of an Isosceles is not itself a ‘self-evident’ fact or truth. Given our immediate experience of the world of solid bodies, certain types of surface (the Isosceles amongst them) inevitably reveal and distinguish themselves in the mediation which alone

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can render the spatial character of that world intelligible. But our 'immediate experience' of the world of solid bodies is one of those 'Immediates' of which we spoke at first — experiences neither true nor false, neither grounds nor consequents of mediation.



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